



Questions and Answers About the Plan to Translocate Columbian white-tailed deer from Julia Butler Hansen Refuge to Ridgefield Refuge

1) What is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service planning to do?

The USFWS is planning an emergency translocation of up to 50 Columbian white-tailed deer (CWTD) from the Julia Butler Hansen Refuge to Ridgefield Refuge to protect the animals if a dike along the Columbia River breaches during winter high water events. The dike, owned by Wahkiakum County Diking District #4, is rapidly eroding along Steamboat Slough Road due to changing river currents. A geotechnical assessment revealed the dike condition is dangerous and at a high risk of failure. CWTD are protected as an endangered species under the federal Endangered Species Act.

2) What will happen if the dike breaches?

Managers believe a dike failure will inundate the refuge with up to six feet of water, potentially killing a significant number of the deer living on the refuge and setting back recovery efforts for the species. Such an event will also flood refuge buildings and infrastructure, causing an estimated \$28 million in total losses.

3) Why doesn't the USFWS just fix the dike?

While the USFWS owns the land behind the dike, the dike itself is owned by Wahkiakum County Diking District #4 and the road on top of the dike is owned by Wahkiakum County so multiple entities need to be involved in finding a solution and funding. More importantly, engineers have said the dike cannot be fixed permanently due to a huge hole in the riverbed at that location. The USFWS has been coordinating with the Diking District, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, local and federal elected officials, and local governments to find a way to prevent a possible dike failure. So far we have

been unsuccessful in finding a remedy that will stop the erosion, nor have we been able to find available funding.

4) How will the USFWS capture and move the deer?

The USFWS will use ground and drop net capture methods beginning in January. In late February, managers may decide these methods are not capturing enough deer to complete the project by early April, so they may decide to use a helicopter to encourage deer into nets to speed capture efforts. A veterinarian will be on site during all capture events to assess and help protect the health of the deer. Captured deer will be moved to Ridgefield Refuge by truck or boat.

5) Why move the deer to Ridgefield Refuge?

Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge is within the historic range of the species and has upland habitat suitable to support the deer. It is not prone to flooding like JBH and managers believe the translocated deer will survive and become permanent residents of the refuge. The USFWS will attach tracking collars and ear tags to translocated deer and, in cooperation with the Cowlitz Tribe, conduct a monitoring program to track deer survival and dispersal rates.

6) Why is the Cowlitz Tribe a partner in this effort?

The Columbian White-tailed deer is a culturally significant species to the Cowlitz Tribe and the tribe has been working with the Service to help recover the species for years. During this time they have acquired considerable experience and expertise in CWTD capture and translocation techniques. The tribe is willing to share this expertise and both skilled and volunteer manpower to help translocate the deer, making them a valuable and valued conservation partner.

7) What alternative translocation sites were considered other than Ridgefield? Why was Ridgefield chosen?

The USFWS reviewed potential translocation sites within the range of the Lower Columbia Distinct Population Segment of the CWTB. Of these, Ridgefield had the largest contiguous area of secure suitable habitat and the fewest potential conflicts.

8) How much will the translocation cost and who is paying for it?

Managers estimate the cost of the translocation effort at \$200,000. Half of the money will be paid by the USFWS and half by the US Army Corps of Engineers from funds allocated for mitigation for the Columbia River channel deepening project.

9) What happens if the deer move off Ridgefield NWR?

The USFWS will contract with U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services to provide services designed to minimize agricultural damage from wandering CWTB. The entire area surrounding Ridgefield NWR is historic Columbian white-tailed deer range and managers believe most deer will remain on the refuge since they will find abundant forage and cover there.

10) What happens if the USFWS doesn't move the deer?

If the dike doesn't breach before the set-back dike is in place: nothing. If the dike breaches, most of the deer remaining on the JBH will die from drowning, hypothermia or starvation as too many deer compete for the small amount of remaining acres not under water.

11) If these deer are native to the Columbia River area why aren't they used to flooded habitat?

When Columbian white-tailed deer evolved along the Columbia River, there was plenty of upland habitat available for them to move to during flood events. Today much of that upland habitat has been converted to human use or blocked off from areas where deer remain by highways, developments and other human construction. The deer are now constricted

into fewer, smaller, more flood-prone areas, making them more vulnerable to flood-caused mortalities.

12) Is there a long-term plan to fix the dike?

The best solution is to build a set-back dike behind the eroding dike, which would protect the deer and refuge lands and provide public access to fishing. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has the money to build a set-back dike and restore about 100 acres of salmon habitat using money appropriated by Congress for salmon recovery efforts. Under the terms of appropriation, the Corps cannot use the money to work on the eroding dike.

13) What happens to the deer that remain on the JBH mainland unit?

If the dike does not breach before the set-back dike is installed they will repopulate the JBH mainland unit, replacing the deer moved to Ridgefield NWR through natural reproduction. If the dike does breach, managers believe the remaining deer will disperse to surrounding areas of upland habitat. Managers believe removing up to half of the JBH mainland unit population will reduce enough pressure on the remaining unflooded habitat to support some or all of the remaining deer.

14) What are the chances that some deer will swim to Oregon or to Sauvie Island?

Entirely possible: deer are good swimmers and CWTD are accustomed to swimming. The Service is working with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and USDA Wildlife Services to provide support if that happens.

15) Would the presence of CWTD affect hunting seasons or other recreational activities on Sauvie Island or Ridgefield?

Managers do not expect significant impacts. Hunters and other recreationists would need to be aware of the presence of an ESA-protected species and act accordingly but this is a challenge hunters and other

recreationists have faced successfully in SW Washington and NW Oregon for decades.

16) What happens if a hunter accidentally shoots a CWTD through a case of mistaken identity? Are the deer easy to tell apart?

Hunters have been discriminating between legal-to-hunt blacktail deer and protected CWTD for decades. Currently there are many hunting seasons in both Washington and Oregon that require hunters to clearly identify deer species. However, if a hunter does accidentally shoot the protected species he should immediately contact the USFWS or WFDW so an investigation can be conducted. The Service's Office of Law Enforcement will evaluate cases where CWTD are killed on a case by case basis.

17) Is it illegal for me to harass a CWTD if it is damaging my property?

As an endangered species, CWTD are protected by the ESA from any effort to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture or collect or to attempt to engage in any such conduct. The Service plans to provide wildlife damage support through the trained professionals of USDA Wildlife Services. Your best option is to contact them for assistance.

18) If the dike does not breach or the set-back dike is successful, would the Service move the deer back?

No. The deer will have adjusted to their new homes and will remain there. The deer remaining on Julia Butler Hansen will repopulate the reduction in deer numbers left by the translocated deer within a few years. Meanwhile the translocated deer and their descendants will help move the species toward recovery, removal from the Endangered Species list, and return to State management.